



Maui SBDC Center Staff, Sonjie Thomas and David Fisher.

MAUI CENTER REPORT

Economically, Maui is one of the stronger counties in Hawai'i, experiencing significant population growth and low unemployment. The County of Maui also includes the sparsely populated islands of Moloka'i and Lana'i, which can be reached by short airplane rides.

The Maui Center of the Hawai'i SBDC Network is located in the top growth area in Maui County, South Maui—in the Maui Research & Technology Center. With this location, and in support of the County's economic development strategy, the Maui Center has worked diligently over the last decade helping small businesses county-wide to take advantage of the internet.

David Fisher, Maui Center Director, manages the Maui office with Sonjie Thomas, his administrative assistant. Fisher is a graduate of Yale University and received his MBA from New York University.

The Maui Center was the first SBDC in the nation to have a web site, to teach classes on "getting wired," and to develop web sites for clients—all in order to create a critical mass of internet users so as to attract a commercial internet service provider to Maui. That first Maui ISP, Maui Global Communications, is now the top ISP serving businesses statewide and has been ranked in the Top 5 Hawaii Growth Companies for the last three years.

While keeping a technology foundation, the Maui Center is evolving a focus on developing growth companies. It is able to do this without abandoning more traditional small businesses, because of other organizations and programs that the Maui Center has helped to evolve over the last years. These include the Maui Economic Opportunity Micro Loan program, the Fast Track Training program, the TIGR Network, and most recently the Center for Entrepreneurship at Maui Community College, which among other activities produces a monthly television show, Maui Works. Fisher has developed curriculum and taught classes for the Center for Entrepreneurship, including what is turning out to be an annual Business Plan Contest.

Central to the growth-business strategy is the Maui Enterprise Forum that was launched in October 2000. This is a monthly event that features a Hawai'i business presenting its plans to a panel and other participants. The panel is carefully selected with the presenting business in mind and is given an opportunity to read the business plan in advance. The panelists critique the plan, and then a general discussion including all participants takes place. All of this is video cast live on the internet, allowing people at distant locations to participate. A videotape is then made available over the Internet for those not able to schedule participation in real time. (<http://MauiEnterpriseForum.Net>).

The eventual goal of the forum is to develop an active angel investor network and to raise and broaden the level of understanding in the community of what is involved in managing a growth venture. Companies that have presented include Vrooms.Com (an Internet application service provider); Wow Wee Candy Bars and Cafe; Air Industries, Inc. (an indoor, air sterilization-device manufacturer), and Origin -The Language Agency (providing online foreign language translation of both web sites, and traditional documents and presentations).

The Maui Center, under the direction of Fisher from its first founding, has contributed significantly to the economic development of Maui County over the last decade, a fact well known to the county's small businesses and to other economic development agencies. For many of those years, the center was unique in its provision of communications technology transfer to small businesses. It now continues in that tradition of seeking out important new areas of knowledge transfer.

County of Maui	
Population:	128,241 people
Density:	110 people/sq. mile
Urban/Rural:	78% urban/22% rural
Size:	1,159 square miles
Major Cities:	Kahului, Kihei, Wailuku
Ethnicity:	35% Others 31% Caucasian 22% Part Hawaiian 15% Filipinos 12% Japanese
Gross Product:	\$2.81 Billion
Industries:	Tourism, services, government, agriculture
Income:	\$23,325 per capita
Unemployed:	4.2%
Clients:	167 clients 1,078 counseling hours
Training:	22 events, 289 attendees
Description:	Maui has the highest ratio of tourists to residents in the state due to its scenic beaches and destination resorts. It also boasts one of the world's largest computers and has strongly promoted high technology.



From left to right: Nelson Hill, Chelsea Hill, and David Fisher.

MAUI CENTER CASE STUDY

Origin - The Online Language Agency

Chelsea Hill, a Canadian native and free-lance translator, started a French and Italian translation/interpreting company called Movimento Communications in October 1998. She wanted to start a business for herself that was project-based so that she would be free to travel with her husband between projects.

A few months later, she went to a workshop sponsored by the Hawai'i SBDC Network, taught by Randolph Craft. Craft asked the attendees the reason they were there and what business ideas they had. After presenting her idea, Craft told Hill, "You're starting a job, not a business." Hill explains, "What he meant by that was, I was planning to do all the translating and interpreting myself, which meant that when I wasn't working, the company wasn't working. From then on, I had a hard time trying to ignore my sense of ambition."

Hill decided to respond to the market demands after receiving many calls for different language translations. Movimento Communications grew into a full service translation company. Hill began a network with her former colleagues, developed a translator database, and changed the name to Origin - The Language Agency. With over 300 translators and interpreters, two full-time employees, and sales offices in England and Seattle, the Maui-based Origin translates any language, any medium, any format and any subject up to and including simultaneous interpreting at international conferences.

Origin markets itself as a company with superior service at competitive rates and creates partnerships with companies that have complementary services. Through "word of mouth" and through its website, Origin has expanded to worldwide markets and after a year and a half, has boosted its annual sales to over \$64,000. Hill says, "The Internet seems to have increased the speed at which languages change. We use professionals living in the target region of the target language." Origin puts great emphasis on keeping excellent relationships with its vendors. Hill says, "We try really hard to make it seem like we are just pushing a button, but it is a lot of work and communication. Our vendors are often asked to do the impossible."

David Fisher, Center Director for the Maui SBDC, assisted Hill in developing the company's operations manual, called "Strive for Excellence" basing its contents on the Malcolm Baldrige criteria. Hill says, "This was David's idea because I had never heard about this before. I thought this was really terrific and grasped the idea with open arms. David was really good about explaining things and making it clear. Although our operations manual is done, it's always evolving."

Fisher has assisted in the company's cash flow projections, performance measurements and sales projections. Fisher also played a big role in the development of the customer feedback form, which is called Origin's "Service Evaluation" and can be accessed on their website. One is also available for the vendors called, "Workflow Evaluation." Fisher encouraged Origin to participate in a pilot project in which the SBDC is working with Mediation Services of Maui. After four sessions, Origin developed an interpersonal business charter that provides valuable communication tools to resolve conflict and to insure productive communication.

Hill is featured on the website of the Maui Enterprise Forum. Through the website, a video can be accessed on Hill's presentation of her business plan. Hill says, "David was invaluable in the development of our business plan. I bought business plan software and contacted different universities to find a way to get a good business plan together. Nothing helped until David and I sat down and battled it out. I am happy with it, and everyone likes it." Hill continues, "David has given me so many leads and contacts including different ways to improve the company. I feel I can depend on David at anytime and for anything."

Hill is appreciative and states, "The Hawai'i SBDC Network provides invaluable service and an unlimited amount of knowledge to start a business, run a new business and to even make a business grow. If I had to pay for these services, it would cost a small fortune."

